critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Bell, Book and Candle-Barrymore, 11/14/50. John van Druten comedy starring Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer. Produced by Irene Meyer Selznick, directed by Mr. van Druten...A Story for a Sunday Evening-Playhouse, 11/17/50. Comedy written, directed and starring Paul Crabtree. Produced by Milo Thomas and Trio Productions. Cloris Leachman and Henry Jones head the supporting cast.

Daily Reviewers Rate the New Plays

The Lady's Not For Burning-Royale, 11/8/50. Christopher Fry's second play seen in America rated better notices than his first. Nine "pros" and three "cons" were filed. Sparkling verse and wit of playwright was praised, though most noted that script was rambling. Cast headed by John Gielgud and Pamela Brown was roundly applauded. Several felt that some of the poetry was of poor quality. Dissenters who couldn't understand and/or like the poetry include critics of News, Compass and Women's Wear. McClain, Journal American, advised playgoers to read the play several times before viewing it. Pollock, Compass, thought Maurice Evans would have done a better job as director and lead. Atkinson, Times, led the cheers when he said that Fry restored the art of literature to the stage.

The Barrier-Broadhurst, 11/2/50-11/4/50. Production of music drama by Langston Hughes and Jan Meyerowitz opened and closed before most knew the play was on view. Four "pros", several mild "cons" and the rest actual pannings were registered from the daily reviewers. Singing-acting performances by Lawrence Tibbett, Muriel Rahn and Wilton Clary in the Spector-Myerberg production won support of most critics. Critics of Herald Tribune, Compass, Journal American and Women's Wear recommended show for limited audience. Pollock, Compass, thought the show made the rest of the season's hits look like nonsense. Some critics felt that the music and lyrics didn't seem to blend effectively. Watts, Post, who filed a mild "con" review, thought the music critics should have appraised the production.

Weekly Critics View the Shows -- additional digests on back page

Hilda Crane-Coronet, 11/1/50. Hobe, Variety, sole weekly appraiser to find merit in Samson Raphaelson's new drama. He agreed with colleagues who called play a natural for women's matinee audiences; but he thought the male escorts would enjoy it also. All found glowing words of praise for performance by Jessica Tandy. Marshall, Nation, considered production as a case history, not a play.

Editorial Pros and Cons

ANTA's Sunday night TV program "Showcase, USA" is designed to stimulate nation wide interest in the theatre. Through a brilliant blend of the best of the past and current theatre it almost achieves its purpose. The only thing missing is a large audience. Fate has placed it in a time segment occupied by two other popular network programs, both of which get much larger audiences. ATPAM and League of New York Theatres should consider means of promoting the program itself. Then and only then can the fabulous infant be of material aid to the fabulous invalid.

News and Notes

John McClain continues to sub for Robert Garland, Journal American. Latter has taken a two months leave of absence to rest after his recent heart attack...Otis Guernsey, Jr., subbing for the ill Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune...Brooks Atkinson, Times, resigned from ANTA board. Critic felt he couldn't fairly rate ANTA shows if he remained...South Pacific profits total $1,300,000.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass (PM, Star)
6. NY Post
7. NY Sun (Morehouse)
8. NY Journal American
9. NY World-Telegram & Sun
10. Brooklyn Eagle
11. Newark News
12. Women's Wear Daily
13. Daily Worker
14. Wall Street Journal
15. Journal of Commerce
16. George Jean Nathan
17. Morning Telegraph
18. Variety
19. Billboard
20. Theatre Arts
21. Catholic World
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr.Sci.Monitor
25. Sat.Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Affairs of State-Royale, 9/25/50. Pro: 11 votes. Con: 1-6-7-10-11-12-14-16-20-22-24-25-26-29.

Arms and the Man-Arena, 10/26/50. Pro: 4-10-11-12-18-23. Con: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-9-14-15-26.

Black Chiffon-48th St.Theatre, 9/27/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 2-3-14-22-27-29.

Call Me Madam-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 22 votes. Con: 19-28-29. So-So: 3.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-9-13-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

The Curious Savage-Martin Beck, 10/24/50. Pro: 3-5-6-9-11-14-15-19-23. Con: 1-2-7-8-10-13-18-26-27-30. So-So: 4-12.

Hilda Crane-Coronet, 11/1/50. Pro: 3-4-6-8-9-10-11-12. Con: 1-2-5.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-12-28. So-So: 16-19-22-23-27.

The Gioconda Smile-Fulton, 10/7/50. Pro: 3-9-10-11-12-14-15-28. Con: 1-2-4-5-6-7-8-17-18-19-22-23-26-27-30.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-25-26-27-28-30.

Kiss Me Kate-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-22-30

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Mrs. Warren's Profession-Bleecker St.Playhouse, 10/25/50. Pro: 1-5-6-7-8-10-12-18-23-28. Con: 2-3-4-9-11-27.

Pardon Our French-Broadway, 10/5/50. Pro: 10-11-12-15-18. Con: 2-3-4-6-7-14-16-19-21-23-26-27-30. So-So: 1-5-8-9.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 11 votes. Con: 1-2-12-16-20-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14-18.

Peter Pan-St.James, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-13-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.

Season in the Sun-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 10-12-24-28. So-So: 11.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 11-16-27-30. So-So: 26.

' Green Room Department '

DIRECTORS CONS...Daily reviewers frequently do a disservice to the director, Kerr, Commonweal, feels. If he attempts to cover up the faults of a bad script he is dismissed as being "frenetic". Critic liked the brisk and economical staging of Legend of Sarah by Benn Levy that had been panned by his daily colleagues.

CRITIC OBJECTS...Chapman, News, in open letter printed in Variety took trade paper to task on several counts. He tries to be an ordinary drama critic doing his best to earn an honest living without doing any work; but they pick on him. He is accused of being "at variance" with his colleagues; but he don't even know where this spot is. He is charged with wrongly guessing the financial outcome of a show, a subject he is not trained in. And he is accused of filing a "so-so" vote on Call Me Madam, when actually it was a two vote decision.

URGES QUINN BILL...In spite of new federal regulations banning new theatre buildings, Theatre News Weekly hopes N.Y.City Council will pass the Quinn Bill. Passage would faith in tomorrow's theatre, and would give more time and study before new theatre buildings are constructed.

SHAW NOTES...Two short films of GBS will soon be released. One is "A Message to American People" made in 1941 when he thought he was going to die. The other is a discussion with John Drinkwater...A magazine, public lectures and production of unproduced plays are planned by newly formed Shaw Society of America... Copyrights to GBS plays continue to November 2, 2000. Chapman, News, reveals that confusion as to rights is expected. Shaw gave rights to some of his plays to more than one person.

7:00 PM CURTAIN...Teen-agers favor the early curtain one night a week, Glendining, WT&S discovered after interviewing six young playgoers. Instigator of the plan, Morehouse, WT&S, reports that League of N.Y.Theatres might ask suburban playgoers to vote on the idea in their local papers.

BEST PLAYS..."Best Plays of 1949-1950" edited by Chapman, News, includes The Cocktail Party, The Innocents, Lost in the Stars, Come Back Little Sheba, The Happy Time, The Wisteria Trees, I Know My Love, The Enchanted and Clutterbuck...Sheaffer, Eagle, would have substituted Montserrat for I Know My Love.

CLEARER SPEECH...Pollock, Compass, disagrees with recent article by W.A.Darlington in Theatre Digest which praised Martita Hunt for her clear enunciation in Madwoman of Chaillot. He agrees that many Americans and the English mouth their words on stage, but Miss Hunt is an expert in causing words to elude the local ears.

YOUNG ACTRESSES...Talented young actresses today have no incentive to improve themselves, complains Clurman, New Republic. Because we are so free with superlatives they feel they have reached the top in the theatre. They move on to the more lucrative motion pictures or TV. No one works hard enough today to become a really great actress.

' Random Notes '

Fifteen countries will witness productions of The Consul by next summer...Professional training program of American Theatre Wing may become permanent institution ...Peter Pan may be televised Christmas Day. Royalties and production would cost 200,000 dollars for the two hour show...Thornton Wilder gives four lectures on American literature at Harvard this term...Museum of Modern Art will present Edith Sitwell in scenes from Macbeth on November 11...First successful amateur theatre in round presented in Lancaster, Pa...John Rosenfield, Dallas News, signed to Columbia Lecture Bureau...ANTA will present Beaux Arts Ball this year as the ANTA Theatre Ball...Variety ad hunting for vaudeville actor who can stay entombed in a cake of ice for a few hours. Job is open in Hollywood.

' Interview Round Up '

BLANCHE YURKA...Famous actress now devoting much time to ANTA work told NBC Eleanor Roosevelt that more good plays are being written today than ever before. As the audience becomes more adult the theatre must present better plays in self defense. Also the emphasis of hero worship has shifted to the motion picture stars. The weak plays that were hits 20 years ago would be flops today.

JOHN GIELGUD...Actor-director of The Lady's Not For Burning never loses the terror of a Broadway first night he admitted to Rice, Post. He also admitted that when he was first given a copy of the Fry script he didn't understand it. He liked it but he was mystified by it. Fry went over the script with the actor for almost a year clearing up the baffling points.

LILLIAN GISH...The Curious Savage star stepped into the leading role at a week's notice, she told Field, Mirror. She memorized her lines lying on a bare slanted board with her head down and feet up. She claims it's relaxing and makes memory tasks easy. The reporter feels that Miss Gish, aged 54, will really never age. The years have added to her gentle beauty.

MARC CONNELLY...Playwright urged more emphatic regional interest in the theatre and actual material evidence of that interest to Theatre News Weekly. The government should give money to any group that recognizes how important the theatre is to the life of the community. Theatre is man's greatest cultural agency, nothing can hurt it. Plans are under way for a revival of Green Pastures.

EDWARD EVERETT HORTON...Actor who has played for years in Springtime for Henry plans to fly to Paris to view a play which he may appear in on Broadway, he told CBS Stork Club. P.G.Wodehouse is also working on a new comedy that he is interested in.

' Weekly Critics Rate the Plays '

The Day After Tomorrow-Booth, 10/16/50-11/4/50. Frederick Lonesdale's drawing room comedy also closed after a short run. Weekly critics urged the author-director to stick to witty dialogue and to forget plot. Time critic was only weekly reviewer to find dialogue sufficient for a full evening's entertainment. Critics thought Beatrice Pearson and Ralph Michael were as chipper as the plot allowed.

Mrs. Warren's Profession-Bleecker St. Playhouse, 10/25/50. Shaw's drama produced by Theatre Venture at the downtown theatre won support of Clurman, New Republic; but he had to agree with George Jean Nathan and Francis, Billboard, that production was very poor. This, in spite of acting by Estell Winwood and Louisa Horton.

The Curious Savage-Martin Beck, 10/24/50. Two more critics found the John Patrick comedy amusing. Kerr, Commonweal, and Clurman, New Republic, both had a good time at the comedy they considered sly and original. Clurman did complain that the actors were the victims of too rigid direction. George Jean Nathan panned play for being dull and repetitious. He noted that cast had hard time staying awake.

Arms and the Man-Arena, 10/26/50. Widely diverse opinions voiced by George Jean Nathan and Clurman, New Republic, on Shaw's comedy. Former thought it was just impossible. Even the characters' names were mispronounced. Clurman again overlooked some production faults. He considers the play Shaw's intelligent man's guide to bright entertainment.

' Legit Stuff '

Daily Compass format switched to departmentalized paper, much akin to weekly news magazines...Preliminary hearings in anti-trust suit against Shuberts now scheduled for December 19 in N.Y.Federal District Court...Lynn Fontanne played role in I Know My Love at Portland, Maine, in spite of fracture of left wrist.